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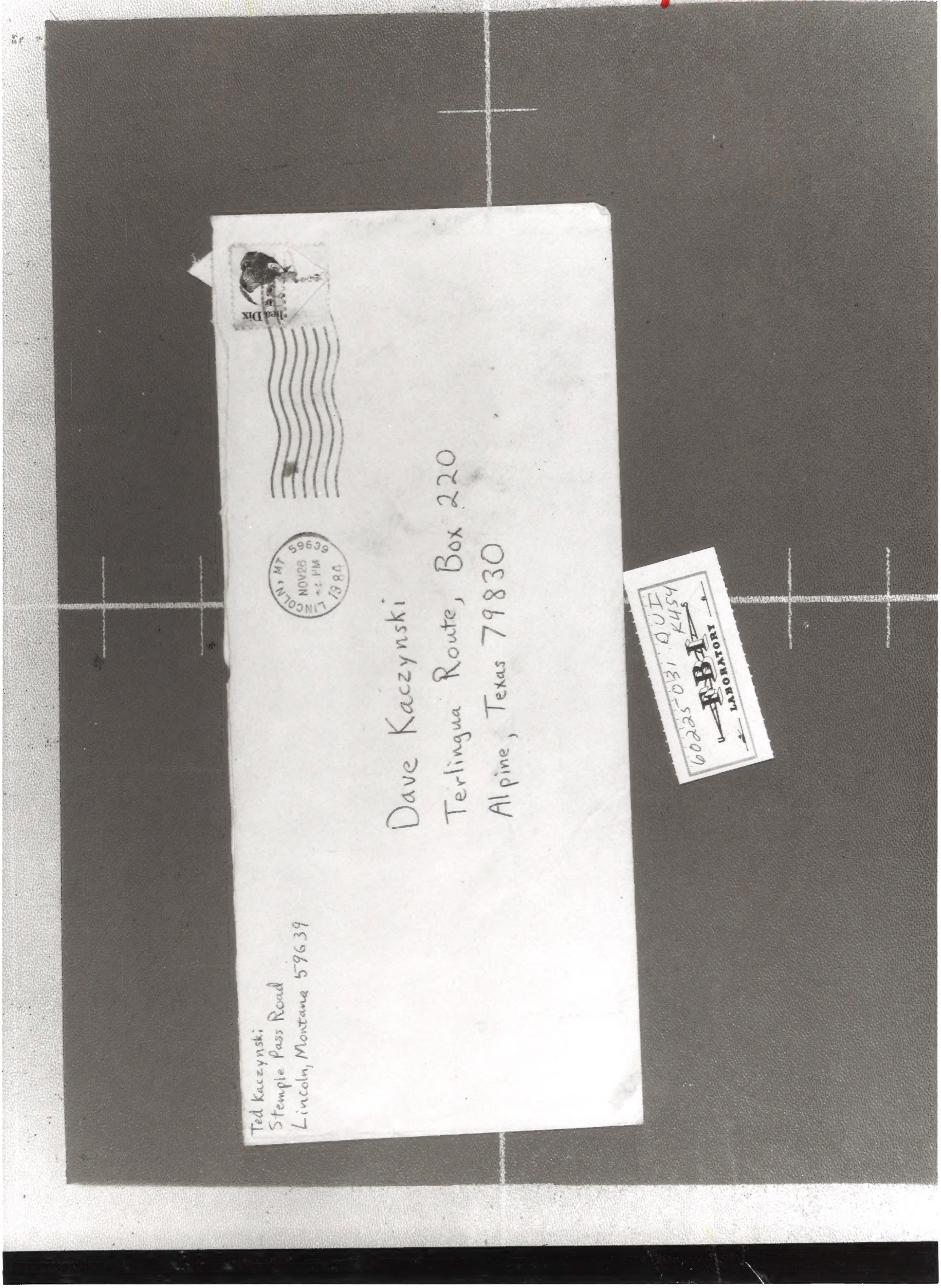

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Dear Dave:

I've just finished reading the Cartas Finlandesas (letters from Finland) and Hombres del Norte (Men of the North) of the Spanish writer Ángel Ganivet. Apparently these materials were written in the 1890's or thereabouts.

Hombres del Norte contains some facts about Henrik Ibsen that certainly surprised me. Given your enthusiasm for literature, I thought you might be interested in some of these facts. Of course, it may be, for all I know, that you are already familiar with this information, but anyway, for whatever they may be worth to you, here are some extracts:

"Ibsen is to the theater what Nietzsche is to philosophy; he is an exalted defender of the individual against society, and in this respect the solutions he advocates approach those of anarchism; then, so as not to subject the action of the individual to any restraint, he falls into extreme authoritarianism....

"What is original in the neoreactionaries like Ibsen is that they base themselves neither on tradition nor on privilege, but rather have contempt for these. They base themselves on the rights of the individual, on the absolute right of the individual to struggle against society, and even to destroy it in order to improve it. In order to reform society, the individual must be reformed, and in order that the individual may be reformed it is necessary that he be permitted to fight without any consideration of the harm he may do to those who are less capable of struggling. In a word, 'might is superior to right'...

"Thus it will be understood why Ibsen, a fugitive from Norway, found no better place in Europe to establish himself than in the Rome of the Popes; not because he was in sympathy with the latter, but because Rome

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was the only city where there was no modern-style liberty. And when the Italian troops entered Rome, Ibsen made off without delay, and wrote a letter that will seem incomprehensible to those who have seen him as a kind of theoretical anarchist: 'They have taken Rome away from men and turned it over to the politicians. Where can we find refuge now? Rome was the only place in Europe that enjoyed true freedom: freedom from the tyranny of political freedom ...' Probably he would think of taking refuge in [Czarist] Russia, for whose autocratic regime he had the greatest enthusiasm.

"The critic Brandes recounts that in a discussion with Ibsen (in which the latter, as usual, exalted the system of opression, which he considered to be the cause of the brilliant flowering of Russian literature) he pointed out to him [Ibsen] that in Russia one is even allowed to beat someone up with impunity. 'You have a son', he said to Ibsen. 'How would you like it if they gave your son a whipping?' 'I wouldn't like it at all', answered Ibsen, 'But if he gave them a whipping I would like it just fine'. ...

" The generous apostles of democracy, who thought they could bring peace to the world by prescribing in laws all of the 'rights of man', would today be tirulatos [word not in dictionary] on seeing that from the womb of justice, equality, and brotherhood there comes a generation of despots, anxious to use all those rights to develop and impose their own personalities even if they have to trample down the weak. We already have abundant evidence of what results from the aristocracy of money; the aristocracy of intelligence that is now beginning to appear will perhaps be worse, for it pretends

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to rule in the name of this or that truth. The priest who said 'believe as I believe' is succeeded by the pretentious genius who says 'Think as I think'. Such a genius or personality is Ibsen...

"Ibsen's male characters are, as a general rule, fools whose mission is to emphasize [by contrast] the superiority of women..."

If all this is accurate, then Ibsen must have been a kind of proto-fascist, and, besides that, an asshole.

Lately I've been re-reading some of Conrad's novels for about the dozenth time. I must say that I thoroughly approve of your taste in selecting him as your favorite author — he used to be your favorite and I assume he still is. The more one re-reads his books the more one appreciates them. I don't know of any other author who can match him for powers of description. He has a magical ability to conjure up mental images — images that capture the imagination — whether he is describing scenery, or a personality, or a situation, or whatever you please.

However, I notice that the Spanish words and phrases scattered through <u>Nostromo</u> are full of errors.

Did you get the dollar + postage stamp that I sent you for the postage on the calculus book that you kindly sent me? I didn't like to send cash, but for such a small sum it wouldn't be worth the cost to get a money order.

Did you play any softball this year? Win any more trophies?

By the way, I guess I have you to thank for introducing me, or re-introducing me, to the writings of Conrad. My first introduction to his work occurred when

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I was too young, and I didn't like it because it was too slow-moving. I didn't get re-introduced to Conrad until I read some of his books that you had in your apartment there in Great Falls. (Maybe if you'd been living up in Conrad I would have learned to appreciate a writer named Great Falls.)

By the way, you know that object I sketched to illustrate the kind of still that I thought Quevedo had in mind when he referred to a "pensive still" in that sonnet I translated for you, "To a Nose"? Well I labelled it an alembic, but I think it should be called a retort. I believe I got the words mixed up because somewhere or other I've seen retorts and alembics mentioned in the same sentence — but I don't know what an alembic is. But anyhow that thing I sketched I'm pretty sure is called a retort.

By way of a Christmas present, I am sending you a copy of Somerset Maugham's The Razor's Edge. I got a paperback copy several years ago and have read it about 3 times. Though I don't like any of the characters in the book, nor the author, nevertheless I have a high regard for this novel — which is not so paradoxical as it sounds. Several months ago I found a hardbound copy of the book, second hand but in excellent condition, for $1.00, and I thought it would make a nice present for you. Hope you haven't read it already. If you have — well, tough luck. Can't help that.

Just recently I learned that they are making a movie of the book. Too bad they are desecrating it that way.

Merry Christmas.

— Ted

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